DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 216 738 JC 820 240

AUTHOR King, Maxwell C.
TITLE Evaluation of the Boards of Trustees: A President's Perspective.
PUB DATE 5 Apr 82
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (62nd, St. Louis, MO, April 4-7, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; *Board Administrator Relationship; College Planning; *College Presidents; Community Colleges; *Governing Boards; Policy Formation; Trustees; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Although there is general agreement on the roles and responsibilities of college presidents and boards of trustees, problems that can impede the effective development and implementation of college policy may arise if either party encroaches into areas for which it is not responsible or if personality conflicts emerge between the president and board members. To avoid these and other potential problems, certain positive approaches to college governance are required of both presidents and boards of trustees. Presidents should understand board operations, be sensitive to time demands upon trustees, and project unconditional positive regard for the board. Board members on their part should, first, recognize their specific roles and responsibilities as well as those of the president, administrative staff, and faculty. Second, they should determine local policy based on broad state laws, careful deliberation, and adequate information. Third, they should attempt to understand all phases of college operations. Fourth, they should support a decision once it has been reached. Fifth, they should not allow political or business considerations or community pressures to affect their decisions. Sixth, they should undertake an in-depth study before making a major decision. Finally, they should maintain open and honest communication with the president and work together for the good of the college and its students. (HB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED216738

EVALUATION OF THE BOARDS OF TRUSTEES: A PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

BY: MAXWELL C. KING

Paper presented at the 62nd Annual Convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (St. Louis, Missouri, April 4-7, 1982).

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Maxwell G. King

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

✓ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

JC 820 240

EVALUATION OF BOARDS OF TRUSTEES: A PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

The first step in a discussion of evaluation of boards of trustees is to define the roles and responsibilities of the president and members of the board. How well a person functions in each particular role is a valuable criterion of evaluation.

The role and responsibilities of the president have been fairly well defined and are generally accepted. The president is the institution's chief administrative officer. As such, he is expected to implement and administer the policy decisions of the board. It is the president's obligation to formulate policy recommendations for the board to consider. Boards and presidents alike must be cognizant of the division of power which exists between them. They must keep foremost in mind the purpose of their job – to make available the highest quality educational programs and services to the community and students they serve.

There seems to be general agreement throughout the country on the role and responsibilities of the president and the board of trustees. The problem does not seem to be awareness, but rather the gradual encroachment of each party into areas for which it is not responsible. For the most part, this encroachment is not premeditated, but evolves unsuspectingly over an extended period of time. The increased occurrence of critical

issues confronting the college too often provides the vehicle for boards becoming excessively involved in the daily administration of the institution. Another cause of role disorder seems to be personality conflicts which emerge between the president and board members. These personality conflicts must be quickly resolved; otherwise, they will have a debilitating effect on the president's effectiveness.

So far as the division of responsibilities is concerned – and looking at the national picture – there seems to be an increasing trend toward boards of trustees becoming more actively involved in the daily administration of their institutions. This is understandable in view of the fact that laws which govern colleges and their boards of trustees generally charge the board with certain specific functions. When these functions are taken literally by the board, the opportunity for role conflicts may emerge. For example, boards of trustees in many states must approve all personnel and financial actions, as well as building construction. In these three areas boards have the final responsibility on behalf of the institution. In reality, boards generally delegate these responsibilities to their chief administrator – who, at a later date, will present appropriate recommendations for their consideration. In some instances, it is difficult for board members to accept presidential recommendations without seeking additional information through further questioning.

Seeking all the information possible concerning a specific issue is a healthy thing, but there is a point where board

members should cease and desist from further questioning else they become too much involved in administration decision making and overstep their bounds as board members. It is becoming more and more apparent there is a fine line between what are and are not legitimate concerns of the board. In order for the board to avoid overextending itself, there must be a great deal of mutual respect and understanding between the president and board. Presidents who practice full information disclosure, who communicate bad as well as good news, who do not trick or surprise the board, etc., are likely to effect a board-president relationship relatively free of misunderstanding and conflict. Board members must continually monitor their behavior and actions lest they hinder rather than facilitate institutional productivity.

Thus we come to what is – to me – one of the most important evaluations of a board: Do board members recognize their specific roles and responsibilities and try not to constantly invade what should be the responsibilities of the chief administrative officer of the institution as well as the administrative staff and the faculty? If so, this is a positive. If they interject themselves into the daily operation of the institution, into administrative areas which are not their pervue, this is a negative.

In pursuing this issue a bit further, we know that in many states laws and regulations set forth the broad policies under which the colleges operate. Thus this important question: Can problems arise at the local level during the further refinement of these policies?

Local policy determination, hopefully, is predicated upon broad state laws and regulations designed to govern the operation of the institution. Difficulties are apt to emerge in instances where state law/regulation is either absent or not fully defined and clarified. In such cases, the board of trustees will interpret the broad guidelines which do exist and effect the institution. Local policy determination is the product of careful deliberation by board members and should be based upon adequate data and sound information. Conflict within the board or between the board and its president can appear when the issue under consideration may have multiple interpretation. When this occurs, it is incumbent upon the board and the president to arbitrate existing differences and make appropriate policy determinations. If board members can work together harmoniously – and not against each other or the president – and reach policy decisions which are in the best interest of the institution, this is a positive.

It is also imperative that presidents understand the rules, regulations, and laws under which the board operates. Where possible, presidents should place themselves in the chairs of board members to get a feeling for what it's like to be responsible for an institution, and yet be obligated to delegate the responsibility for institutional administration to someone else.

Presidents should also be sensitive to the time demands placed upon trustees. Presidents must not give board members reason to believe they can more effectively operate the institution were trustees absent from the picture. Chief administrative

officers who isolate their boards from the college community can anticipate board suspicion manifested in excessive inquiry. Above all else, a president's actions must not cast a negative reflection on the trustees. Presidents must, at all times, project unconditional positive regard for the board.

The desire of a board member to thoroughly understand all phases of college operation is a positive. Resisting or blocking this desire is a negative on the part of the president.

Once a decision is reached by a board, members of an effective board should all band together to support this decision. However, the reality of the situation reveals this does not always occur. In my twenty-two years of working with boards of trustees in community colleges, almost all our decisions were unanimous. I can recall one instance when a decision of the board was not accepted by one of its members. That particular board member continued to pursue his point of view long after the decision had been rendered. He was responsible for generating open conflict among board members. This experience resulted in hard feelings between college management and members of the board of trustees for almost two years. One would expect that a minority opinion following a majority decision would gradually dissipate and not surface as an irritant in future board deliberations. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. It is my opinion that once a board makes a decision, it should hold fast by that judgment and not reverse itself. It seems to me that a board which vacillates on a decision gradually erodes its own credibility and effectiveness.

The instance I have related had to do with the site selection of one of our campuses. One of my board members refused to accept the majority decision of the board and continued to put pressure on the administration to alter our recommendation. My responsibility was clear – to support the board's decision. As this problem developed, it became apparent the dissenting member was not as much concerned about the location of the campus as he was about using the issue to seek reprisal for some personality conflicts he had with leaders in the community. Tragically, this board member lost sight of his professional responsibilities in order to secure personal satisfaction. As it turned out, he was responsible for his loss of effectiveness as a board member.

When a board member allows such as this to happen, it is one of the most devastating and tragic of all negatives.

Looking at another side of the coin – it is one of the board's prime obligations to have a complete understanding of the role and responsibilities of the president. Having developed this understanding, board members will be in a better position to support the president as he implements the policy which they have determined. To function at peak efficiency and effectiveness, the college president must enjoy the board's respect, support, and commitment. Board members must at times be sensitive to the need for confidentiality and correct timing.

Board members should make every effort to become involved in the college community. I am not implying the board should become involved in the administration of the institution. I am,

however, suggesting that for board members to fully understand and appreciate college programs and services, they must become involved. If board members are willing to give of themselves and their time to accomplish this goal, it is a positive. If a board member holds himself or herself aloof from the college community – and limits their contact with the college to board meetings – this is a negative.

I also suggest that presidents should provide board members with quality in-service education opportunities which will better prepare them to discharge their job functions. Very few appointed board members are professional educators, and most have no previous experience concerning the administration of an educational institution.

If board members are willing to devote as much time as possible to participating in college in-service programs, to sitting as non-voting observers on selected college committees, to attending state, regional and national conventions and workshops designed to enhance their abilities as trustees, then this is a positive. If they shun such activities, and assume the attitude of "I don't need such experience to perform as a board member," then this is a negative.

For the sake of the time limit of this panel I will suggest some other evaluation points in abstract form:

Does a board member allow political party affiliation to play a part in decision making? For example: if a local legislator proposes a bill that is not in the best interest of the

institution, will the board member go along with it because he or she belongs to the same political party as the legislator? If so, this is a negative.

Will a board member allow personal business associations or professional associations play a part in decision making? If so, this is a negative.

Can a board member be swayed constantly by pressure coming from community voices who differ on a particular issue, tacking back and forth like a sailboat, moving whichever way the wind blows at a particular moment, basing decisions on minor pressures rather than sound facts? If so, this is a negative.

Will a board member do his or her homework thoroughly – no matter how much time it takes – before a decision is made concerning a major issue facing the board? If so, this is a positive.

Will a board member allow personal opinions and personal prejudices to influence a decision regarding the welfare of a particular phase of college operation? If so, this is a negative.

Will a board member always place the good of the college and the students above all other considerations? If so, this is a super positive.

Board members have a duty to represent the public. Citizens comprising the college's service area must feel as though the board is communicating their concerns, needs, and viewpoints to the president and his administrative staff. Board members must listen

attentively to the people, gather and assimilate information, and refer appropriate items to the president and his staff for reaction. Clearly, a president must earn the confidence, respect, understanding, and positive regard of the board. These feelings are not automatic and are the product of hard work, dedication, and commitment on the part of the president.

If board members and the president work together for the total good of the institution, and maintain open and honest lines of communication which result in mutual understanding and problem solving, then the evaluations on both sides will be positive.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
96 Powell Library Building
University of California
Los Angeles, California 90024

JUL 9 1982